



BALLARAT FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

EXCURSION/NEWS SHEET - DECEMBER 1977

President:	Mr. G. Binns	Ph. 323670
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Meetings held in the Biology Section at the School of Mines, Lydiard St. Sth., first Friday of each month.

1952-1977

At this time we celebrate and look back over twenty five years of activity and achievement. The Club has been developed and served by a changing membership with, no doubt, continuity maintained by a sound nucleus of competent and knowledgeable naturalists. I feel that we must accept as a challenge the legacy of fine example of effective field work, recording and campaigning achieved in the name of the Club over the past twenty five years. Our objectives can be best achieved through shared experience and knowledge, and by the combining of resources from within and outside the Club.

As a reminder of our heritage I commend to you the booklet *The Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat - 1952 - 1977*, published to mark this auspicious occasion. Let us hope that the Club may enter a new era of renewed energy and enterprise.

Greg Binns.

LIFE MEMBER HONOURED.

At the National Herbarium on the 14th November 1977 Mr. Jack Wheeler of Geelong, who was the prime mover in the formation of our Club in 1952, was presented with the 1977 Australian Natural History Medallion, for outstanding achievements in the field of natural history, by well known artist Neil Douglas.

Mr. Douglas spoke of the conservation work undertaken by Mr. Wheeler over the past 25 years, and the importance of continuing vigilance by all conservationists.

In 1961 Mr. Wheeler became a foundation member of the Geelong Field Naturalists' Club, and served as President from 1965-71. As a very keen member of the Bird Observers Club, Mr. Wheeler served as B.O.C. representative on the You Yang management committee. In 1969 the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve was gazetted and Mr. Wheeler has given outstanding service to its development ever since. Over the years he has compiled many bird lists, been active in bird banding, organised a survey of Mt. Cole vegetation and fauna, and in 1976 wrote a booklet "The Care of Sick and Injured Native Birds and Animals." Many thousands of copies have been distributed free.

Over the past 20 years Mr. Wheeler has written many valuable articles on all aspects of natural history in Nature Notes, and so has fostered the joy and need for conservation in many citizens.

Mr. Wheeler concluded the evening with an illustrated lecture on the breeding rookeries of gannets, and the flora and fauna of the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve.

In 1958 we were fortunate to accompany Mr. & Mrs. Wheeler on a wonderful trip to Western Australia, and since then have spent many hours together enjoying the wonders of our flora and fauna.

S. Bedggood.

ALBATROSS ISLAND.

At the monthly meeting on 4th November Mr. R. Warnecke of the Fisheries and Wildlife Dept. gave an interesting talk on his visit to Albatross Island in 1973.

A small, rocky island one mile long, 100 ft. high, sloping out of the water on the western side and dropping sheer on the eastern face, Albatross Island is situated in Bass Strait off north west Tasmania. Late in 1798 Matthew Flinders and Bass set out from Sydney to prove there was a strait between the Australian mainland and Tasmania. They found, and named Albatross Island.

There was a huge seal colony on Albatross Island and in 1813 James Kelly sailed from Sydney and established himself as a sealer there. In two years the sealers took 5,700 seals, usually taking just the skins, which were dried in the sun or salted down. The concentrated breeding season of the seals is November - December, and one pup is born to each female. Male seals reach a weight of 800 lbs. and females 250 lbs. Their food is basically squid, cuttle fish, octopus, barracuda and other fish easy to catch.

Mr. Warnecke also showed slides of the albatross colony on the island and spoke of their habits and the banding done for scientific purposes. In the early days the sealers killed the albatross for their feathers, receiving 2½d. a pound for them. The island is the only breeding ground for albatross in Australian waters, and it's estimated there are between 15 and 20 thousand in the colony.

Mrs. Kierath moved a vote of thanks to Mr. Warnecke for his interesting and informative talk.

Betty Gray.

B.R.A.C.E. LECTURE PROGRAMME: 18th February 1978. Mr. Howard Jarman - Bird Watching. "Brace" Building, East St., 8 p.m. Excursion Sunday 19th February. Would those intending to go, please let the Secretary have your names as soon as possible?

BASALT EXCURSION.

Several car loads of Camera Club members joined us on 6th November for a very pleasant afternoon inspecting part of the Wombat State Forest at Basalt, where Forest Ranger John McCormack showed us areas that are to be cleared for pine plantations, and it is expected that 700 hectares of pines will be planted. Areas of natural forest 40 metres wide are to be retained along the creeks, and the Forest Officers and L.C.C. are to work in harmony, assuring that the delicate balance of nature is upset as little as possible. Clearing is to begin next year.

There was a good variety of plant and bird life in the area we inspected near Deep Creek and further on toward Werona Road. Some plants listed were the attractive little Wattle Mat Rush, Heathy Parrot Pea, Large Leaf Bush Pea, several acacias, the beautiful golden Glory Pea, Violas hederacea and betonicifolia, Musk orchids, an abundance of Fringe lily, Bearded orchids, Sun orchids and a beautiful shrubby Comesperma was especially admired. At the lovely spot by the creek chosen as our afternoon tea stop, I found myself feeling especially thankful that this area at least would not be disturbed by tree felling operations.

There were some magnificent old eucalypts hereabouts, and the grey fantails were very active. Also noted were Roufous Whistler, Restless Flycatcher, White-throated Treecreeper, the tinkling of the Pardalotes and Zebra Finches; Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, White-winged Choughs, and Silvereyes very busy in the dense undergrowth by the creek. Leaden Flycatchers and Ravens were also about the area.

Florence Williamson.

EXCURSION 4th December: Linton Block and BOC Block, Linton.

EXCURSION 5th February: Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. (9.30)
a.m.

MEETING 3rd February 1978: Member's Night.

ANOTHER ANNIVERSARY!!

On Sunday 13th November 1977, the 25th Anniversary of the Victorian National Parks Association Formation was held at "Sea Winds", Purves Road, Arthur's Seat.

"Sea Winds", a delightful 34 hectare property managed by the National Parks Service, is the headquarters of the Nepean Division of that Service which covers all the Mornington Peninsular. This property, one of a number round the peak of Arthur's Seat, managed by N.P.S. is part of Nepean State Park. The Park will eventually include Pt. Nepean, Cape Schanck, Green's Bush and other areas yet to be secured for posterity.

Amongst the tours throughout the day from "Sea Winds" we went to Bushrangers Bay, first to Cape Schanck by coach then a 6 km. cliff top walk to Burrabong and Main Creeks and Beach, and to Bones Road for return to Base. As well as the magnificent views from "Sea Winds" this was also greatly appreciated. Other tours went to Green's Bush and Waterfall Gully.

As well as a short address by Ros Garnet on early doings of V.N.P.A. a tree planting by the Premier, Mr. R. Hamer was undertaken. N.P.S. provided a continuous Audio Visual Slide show of various features of areas on the Peninsular and a 45 minute film of 4 major National Parks, Wilson's Promontory, Wyperfeld, Mt. Buffalo, and Port Campbell, from a former A.B.C. series.

Over 1,000 people enjoyed the day, and after partaking of the delights of the garden, although formal and not native, we can recommend it to anyone who wishes to visit the area.

Edna and Peter Fry.

A new member, Barry Heywood, was welcomed to the Club at the November meeting. We wish you many happy hours spent with us, Barry.

The next COMMITTEE meeting is on 7th December.
SUGGESTIONS are asked for items for next years meetings,
and venues for excursions. Could they be handed in by
this date please?

NOMINATIONS for office bearers for 1978 are to be
handed in at the meeting on 3rd February 1978. Annual
Meeting 3rd March, 1978.

LERDERDERG GORGE FOREST PARK.

There were nine cars that made the trip to
O'Brien's Crossing for the November mid-monthly
excursion.

The area explored is located near Blackwood and
the main feature is the rugged terrain of the
Lerderderg River. The afternoon was spent along the
delightful river walking track. Botany, geology and
bird observer members found much to occupy their time.

Some eucalypts identified were candlebarks (*Euc.*
rubida); manna gum (*Euc. viminalis*), narrow-leaf
peppermint (*Euc. radiata*), broad-leaf peppermint (*Euc.*
dives), and messmate (*Euc. obliqua*).

Understorey vegetation consisted of acacias and
other members of the legume family, ferns, lilies,
bottlebrushes and mint bushes.

The forest slopes and waterway support a vast
number of bird species. Some birds identified were
white-winged trillers, welcome swallows, golden
whistlers, blue wrens, yellow robins, flame robins,
wedge-tailed eagle and a sacred kingfisher.

On the homeward journey, via Bullengarook, a short
stop was made on a flat ridge top where the disastrous
Gisborne bushfire had failed to reach. Of great
interest to members were the beautiful blue dampiera
(*Dampiera stricta*), rosy heath-myrtle (*Baeckea*
ramosissima), pultenaeas, acacias and orchids.

Pat Murphy.

REQUIEM FOR A RAINFOREST.

From an Article by F.E.G. Harrap in the Bird Observer,
September 1977. (Conclusion of first instalment Nov. issue)

The track into the rainforest leaves the dirt road just beyond the point where power lines cross the scarp and descends into a jungle of palms and upended wrecked cars. From October 1975 until July 1976, I visited the area on some 25 occasions for a total of about 65 species. The rainforest doesn't give up its secrets readily and in fact it wasn't until my seventeenth visit that I did see a new bird in the area. It was one of those magical areas where birds were here, there and everywhere. Superb blue wrens, Red-browed finches, Yellow robins, Silvereyes, Grey fantails and White-browed scrub-wrens seemed to be restlessly on the move across the track. Whipbirds, Catbirds and Satin bower birds dived in and out of the undergrowth.

The earlier highlights were undoubtedly Grey goshawk at the nest with the noises of the young birds carrying some hundred metres and more and Spine-tailed log runner generally seen in the gloom under a lantana thicket. As the seasons passed and the available food varied, so did the birds. For several weeks King parrots and Catbirds would be much in evidence and then there would be quite a spell before they reappeared in any numbers. On one occasion, I had no less than six Rufous fantails fluttering around me, on another a Superb lyrebird plunged into view, putting up a very disturbed Green-winged pigeon.

It was of great interest to see how the rainforest pigeons varied in their timidity - the Brown pigeons seemed to settle up on high and prepared to stick it out, the Green-winged pigeons were off like a bullet, the Wonga pigeons would sometimes walk along the track in front of me but if disturbed in the undergrowth they too were up and away very rapidly. The Top-knots and on occasions there were up to a hundred in view, would settle for some minutes and then up and away as they circled, landed and then were soon off again.

Besides the Grey goshawk, which was seen several times, other birds of prey included Brown hawk - on one

visit seen in a tangle with a pair of Peregrines, Whistling eagle, White-breasted sea eagle and Wedge-tailed eagle. It was mid June 1976 when I saw the Wedge-tail, just before my last visits.

I hadn't visited the area for three weeks and when I returned I first realised that the end was in sight. The tracks had been widened and the lantana that had sealed off the path to the ponds had been blitzed away by the two bulldozers that were mudbound near the ventilation shaft from one of the local coal mines. My notes for the day read: "June 12th, Mt. Kembla, Wedge-tailed eagle, Black duck, Brown-headed honeyeater (all three new to the area for me,) Mistletoe-bird (m) about 100 Top-knot pigeon, Grey goshawk, Brown pigeon." When the goshawk appeared on the scene, the pigeons were up and it was as if they were putting on a farewell flypast.

A week later, there was still access but the tracks were wider and longer. Three weeks later after a lightning visit to Dorriggo before we moved away from N.S.W. and the rainforests, the barbed wire was up, the gate padlocked and entry was forbidden. There were a hundred or more Top-knots in the trees just outside the rainforest area that I had come to know so well.

It can never be the same again, I shall never go back again - it's gone but I'm glad that I came to know it so well while it lasted.

F.E.G. Harrap, Ballarat.

NOW AVAILABLE

"The Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat. 1952-1977"
Copies available from the Secretary. 52 pages. \$1.

The President and his committee extend to all members, families and friends, Best Wishes for a Happy Christmas and a Bright and Prosperous New Year. Happy holidaying and a safe return.